

South Atlantic Branch of the Gulf Fishermen's Association

February 24, 2010

Mr. Duane Harris, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Mr. Harris,

At the September Council meeting we presented the Council with results from: 1) a **sign-on letter** and 2) a **fishermen's survey** to demonstrate fishermen support for a snapper grouper commercial catch share. After the September Council meeting we continued to get surveys back and therefore wanted to provide you an update in advance of the upcoming catch shares workshop and Catch Share Committee meeting.

Sign-on Letter:

To recap, we had 78 people sign-on to a letter in support of catch shares. This included 22 permit holders (holding 29 permits) and 56 others that represented captains and crew, a fish house owner, a charter fisherman, a marina operator, a restaurant owner, and family of SG fishermen. At least 76% of the permits holders are considered high-liners and almost 100% of permit holders are full-time snapper grouper fishermen.

Survey Results:

At the time of the meeting we had 38 surveys returned with 23 (a little over 60%) in favor of a catch share and 13.2% respondents who want a catch share in the event of shortened fishing seasons or if the Council were to consider fewer area closures, shorter spawning season closures and no trip limits. The survey was sent to approximately 630 limited and unlimited permit holders not previously contacted regarding the sign-on letter or who already made their position known in favor or against catch shares. After the meeting we continued to get surveys.

As of January when we received the last survey, we had a total of 60 surveys returned – **37 (62%) respondents resoundingly wanted a catch share** and **8 (13%) respondents want a catch share in the event of shortened fishing seasons or if the Council were to consider fewer area closures, shorter spawning season closures and no trip limits**. There were only 15 respondents (25%) who did not want the Council to consider catch shares. All but 5 respondents were unlimited permit holders with an overall high response rate for a mail survey of a little over 11%.

While the percentage of overall support of catch shares remained relatively stable (about 75%), the number of responses increased by over 60% (permit holders only).

Many fishermen are seriously concerned about their ability to make a living as a result of the deepwater closure (Amd 17B), 4-month spawning season closure (Amd 16), and the pending red snapper closure (Amd 17A). These, combined with the shorten fishing seasons for black sea bass, golden tilefish, and vermillion make it harder and harder to make ends meet. We think, along with many of our fellow fishermen, that a catch share could be better in the short-term and long-term than the current situation

We provide you this update and ask that the Council do everything possible to make a snapper grouper commercial catch share amendment a priority and expedite the time line to implementation.

Sincerely,

South Atlantic Branch of the Gulf Fishermen's Association

Matt Ruby

Phil Conklin